

**Fisheries Constituent Summary from the
U.S. Caribbean Coral Reef Fisheries Workshop
San Juan, Puerto Rico September 30 – October 1, 2002**

On September 30th and October 1st, NOAA Fisheries in partnership with the University of Puerto Rico's Sea Grant Program, hosted a successful Caribbean Coral Reef Fisheries Workshop in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The workshop included over 120 attendees in addition to the 42 major speakers and panelists. Among the NOAA constituents that attended, there were representatives from the artisanal fishing community from Puerto Rico and USVI; ornamental fish collecting community from Puerto Rico; university professors and students; the Chair and members of the Caribbean Fishery Management Council; NGOs, the recreational diving community, representatives from Puerto Rico's Department of Natural and Environmental Resources (DNER); and the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR). This workshop was requested by the Territory and Commonwealth marine resource managers of the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

The main objectives of the workshop were to exchange experiences of best management practices among managers from Puerto Rico and USVI and to develop recommendations within the four focal themes of the workshop. These Caribbean focused themes were coral reef fisheries use, coral reef fisheries in the broader context of coastal management, regulations and enforcement, and education and outreach. These recommendations were presented to the Coral Reef Task Force (CRTF) during the first day of their meeting. Fishers and ornamental fish collectors took part in panel discussions and the style of the workshop permitted ample time for the audience to participate and make recommendations.

Most of the comments and recommendations were for action in Commonwealth and Territorial waters, and were directed to the agencies with the appropriate jurisdiction, DNER and DPNR. However, participants from fishing constituencies did look to NOAA for help to address the following:

- The coordination of Federal and state maritime and resource regulations to reduce overlaps, conflicts, or gaps.
- The development of government partnerships with fishers in data collection, enforcement, education, and management.
- The creation of opportunities for fishers to exchange experiences, and financial support to make this possible. There was particular interest in opportunities for exchange between communities that had no-take reserves and those where new areas were proposed.

NOAA Fisheries is addressing follow-up on several of these issues with three workshops for Puerto Rico's fishing communities and other marine resource users, hosted by the NOAA Fisheries Caribbean Field Office. NOAA also expects funding to be available in FY-03 for activities designed by the Commonwealth and Territory through the Coral Reef Conservation Grants Program.

All the participants were pleased with the workshop and were very appreciative of NOAA of taking a lead on organizing this event.

The fishers offered the following summarized key points:

Coral Reef Fisheries Regulations and Enforcement

- Develop and enforce laws fairly to increase fishers' trust in the government.
- Laws and regulations should be integrated and not conflict, or overlap.
- In developing fisheries regulations in Puerto Rico, the selection of species allowed for ornamental collection should not be arbitrary, but should be based on science (e.g., use the results of the Mote Marine Lab study being implemented by DNER and funded by NOAA Fisheries).
- Ensure that new fisheries regulations are enforceable and enforced (especially in no-take areas) in order not to penalize fishers who obey the laws.
- Pass regulations associated with Puerto Rico's fisheries and coral conservation laws.
- Recreational fisheries should be regulated and require permits in the same manner that permits are required for commercial fisheries.

Coral Reef Fisheries in the Context of Coastal Zone Management

- Keep the fishers informed of management and regulatory decisions, and involve fishers in every level, including the highest, as much as possible.
- Government partnerships should be forged with fishers in data collection, enforcement, education, and management.
- Address non-fisheries impacts on essential fish habitat. Fishers felt blamed for damage to reefs, while coastal developers with much greater impacts on habitat were perceived to be getting a "free ride."

Coral Reef Fisheries Use

- Whenever there is financial compensation from a natural disaster (e.g., loss of fishing gear due to hurricanes), allow the resource users the freedom to spend the funds to meet their needs, versus dictating how the money should specifically be spent.
- Provide alternatives, including perhaps financial payments, to fishers who face a loss of income or livelihood due to restrictions in fishing activity.
- Recognize ornamental fish collectors as commercial fishers in Puerto Rico's fishery regulations. Ornamental fish collectors expressed that they feel discriminated against by DNER in relation to other fishing groups.
- Provide support for Marine Aquarium Council (MAC) in developing sustainable ornamental fish collection, handling and management criteria. MAC is a NGO that is developing volunteer standards for ornamental fish collection. *NOAA is providing assistance to MAC in developing sustainable ornamental fish collection, handling and management criteria.*
- Partner with MAC to bring the Pacific experience in aquarium trade to the Caribbean.

Education and Outreach

- Provide alternatives and training to reef fishing. Provide grants to fishers or co-ops to make this possible.
- Meetings with fishers should take place in the fishers' areas to facilitate comfort in communicating and trust.

Additional key comments

- Marine reserves are necessary but not sufficient.
- Management should be driven by objectives and not by the data available – which given the complexity of coral reef fisheries is nearly always lacking.

Next Steps

- Puerto Rico's Sea Grant Program is developing proceedings from the Fisheries Workshop.
- NOAA Fisheries will be building on the recommendations developed at the workshop and will formulate follow-on activities with the fishers. Specifically, our Puerto Rico Office is following up with three local workshops that will include a broader representation of fishers to address their concerns.
- The Coral Reef Task Force identified overfishing as one of their major focal areas.
- The results of the Fisheries Workshop will be presented to the Caribbean Coral Reef Fishery Management Council at its December meeting.
- A companion workshop is being planned for the Pacific in early 2003, made possible with funding from NOAA Fisheries.